
Information and System Design for Diversity: Can We Do Better?

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Digital information practitioners across many areas seek to preserve and provide access to the voices of disenfranchised and marginalized communities. However, the curation of cultural objects often comes with colonial implications and power-based hierarchical differentials. Providing access to the collections of these groups requires genuine, responsive cooperation, and it also requires that the technical and information systems through which we engage community contributors and participants be equally responsive to diverse cultural circumstances and needs. With support from an IMLS National Forums grant, the Northeastern University Digital Scholarship Group seeks to facilitate a national conversation from which we can learn about responsible partnership in digital projects involving such community-driven collections. We will host a series of public and working meetings to produce a teaching and learning toolkit, to prompt education and change in the approach to systems design for diverse and culturally-sensitive materials.

The need for community-driven pedagogy in this area is well recognized. Practitioners in many fields seek genuine, responsive partnership with the communities in which cultural artifacts were created (See, for example, the repatriation policies of the United States' National Museum of the American Indian or Johnston on recent discussions of repatriation prompted by new publications in the museum field.), deeper understanding of the hegemonic role of knowledge representation via standardized ontological decisions (Berman 1971, Olson 2002.), and investigation into the role of algorithm, interface, and tool design in reinforcing power differentials inherent in the status quo

(McPherson 2012, Sweeney 2013, Chun 2011) These topics also arise in venues such as journal special issues (see, for example: *Code4Lib Special Issue on Diversity in Library Technology*, 2015; *Archival Science Special Issue: Keeping Cultures Alive: Archives and Indigenous Human Rights*, 2012; *Library Quarterly Special Issue on Diversity and Library and Information Science Education*, 2013), conference presentations and keynotes (Noble 2015, Matienzo 2015, Cole 2015) such as held by the Society of American Archivists, and current CFPs, such as those of *Digital Humanities Quarterly*, *Archives*, and *ALISE*. New interdisciplinary projects focus on building new methods and tools for archiving media content as a corrective to past silences in the archive (Documenting the Now, Social Media Archives Toolkit, Documenting Ferguson, Our Marathon, to name a few). This work suggests more challenging questions: What ethical decisions inform the dissemination of digital collections? How are naming and representation in our information systems influenced by power? When tools and interfaces guide interactions with documents and items, are those interfaces responsive to community needs, or do they force a diversity of ideas into ill-fitting boxes?

To engage with these issues and inform the toolkit we plan two forum events at which we seek to gather a diversity of perspectives and input on the questions above. The first forum will be held in October 2017, and our preparation for that event will involve a detailed scan of existing LIS and museum pedagogy in the areas central to our focus, and an examination of existing project methodologies and processes. We will also develop a set of design provocations, discussion questions, and a reading list. The poster will present the results of the environmental scan, the design prompts, reading list, and discussion questions for the opening forum, and the preliminary design ideas for the toolkit for critique and commentary by DH2017 conference participants. Our goal for the project is to involve diverse community input at every stage of the design, and this poster represents the first step in that process.

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